



Related
Articles



President's Perspective

Technologies for Military Training Have Key Role in Supporting Force Readiness

by **Lawrence F. Skibbie**

This month I would like to reflect with you on the functions of associations in general, and NDIA in particular. As this column is written, we have just returned from the 19th Interservice/Industry Training Simulation and Education Conference in Orlando, Florida. I/ITSEC is a major conference for the training and simulation community displaying amazing technologies ranging from virtual reality systems for the conduct of sophisticated wargames to eye-popping simulators with realistic imagery.



However, as I reminded the 4,000 plus participants, we must not let the technology of these devices distract us from their fundamental role: to improve the readiness of our armed forces.

The conference this year was especially timely because there appears to be a growing realization that resources will continue to shrink and, if we are to maintain the quality of our preeminent military force, then we will need to find ways to trade off steaming, flying and operating hours for savings to be invested in modernization.

Of interest, the Air Force keynoter, Gen. Dick Hawley, USAF, commander Air Combat Command, posed a concept for such a trade-off in the acquisition strategy to be used on the new Distributed Mission Training concept for ACC. Specifically, the Air Force proposes a "fee for service versus a system procurement approach." It does not plan on owning or maintaining the hardware but rather on buying a service. In effect, this means an acquisition role reversal in that industry is asked to make a large up-front capital investment in hardware and then amortize costs and generate profit over what could be a long term contract. Many people at the conference pondered whether this strategy could be applied to other areas in the acquisition spectrum.

Of course, I/ITSEC is more than simply a trade show. The term "Interservice/Industry" reflects the interdependence between the uniformed

services and what I often refer to as the fifth or non-uniformed service-defense industry. In fact, without defense industry, the four uniformed services, no matter how joint, are impotent. It is industry that must provide the necessary equipment and technology which allows our military to be the best in the world.

NDIA's purpose as a defense association is to facilitate communication and interchange between government and military. We provide for that interaction through conferences such as I/ITSEC focusing on specific technologies or issues. And it is at these conferences where we bring industry's attention to bear on government problems to facilitate better government understanding of industry problems.

Obviously, to do that work we need as broad a membership as possible; most importantly we need you as members. Certainly our current membership of almost a thousand companies and 25,000 individuals-both government and industry-is a good start.

However, as the pressure to shrink defense continues, we need each of our current members to get a new member to allow us to speak with an even stronger voice, both on Capitol Hill and throughout the country.

So as you read this, if you are already a member, thank you, and I trust you will continue. And if you are not a member, I hope you will join us as we continue our support of national security and the requisite industrial base to support that effort.

On another but similar front, I want to recognize the effort of the NDIA Michigan chapter in facilitating interchange between government and industry. Officials there were recently called upon to assist the Army in developing a plan to dramatically alter near-term production of current tactical vehicles to generate savings to finance the Army After Next-an evolving concept for the way the force will fight after the year 2020.

Obviously such action would have severe implications for the industrial base currently providing systems such as the XM1, Bradleys, tactical trucks, munitions and howitzers.

The Michigan chapter arranged for a one-day colloquium in early November that was praised by Maj. Gen. John F. Michitsch, USA, Army PEO for ground combat and support systems. Michitsch pointed out that both contractors and government officials benefited from the event and as a result were much more aware of the implications on both sides of the government/industry partnership of such a significant action.

And that leads me to comment that your NDIA is truly a unique organization, with great flexibility to respond to different needs. While many are aware of our activities-national symposia on technical and other issues, an active presence on Capitol Hill, a vibrant National Defense magazine communicating industrial base issues- many may not be aware of such

...commencing meeting case about many may not be aware of such activities as the ad hoc symposium sponsored by the Michigan chapter.

The message that everyone should take with them is that the association can do almost anything, if it but knows what is needed. Here I have in mind tailored round table discussions alerting government managers to acquisition problems; quick reaction meetings such as the Michigan chapter pulled together; industry surveys; and the list could go on and on. In all these activities, the forcing function was the association becoming aware of the need and then calling upon its broad array of resources to respond in the interest of national defense.